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In re Application of :
Hwang, et al. :
Application No. 10/753,258 :
Filed: January 5, 2004 :
Attorney Docket No. N0127/PP/HH

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OFFICE OF PETITIONS

ON PETITION

This is a decision on the petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment under 37 CFR 1.181, and the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) to revive the above-identified application filed in the alternative, both filed July 5, 2005.

The petition under 37 CFR 1.181(a) to withdraw the holding of abandonment is **DISMISSED**.

The petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is also **DISMISSED**.

Any request for reconsideration or petition under 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extension of time under 37 CFR 1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition Under 37 CFR 1.137(a)." This is **not** a final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C § 704.

The above-identified application became abandoned for failure to reply to the Notice to File Corrected Application Papers mailed September 3, 2004, which set a shortened statutory period for reply of two (2) months from its mailing date. No response was received within the allowable period, and the application became abandoned on November 4, 2004. A Notice of Abandonment was mailed on May 12, 2005. The instant petition was filed on July 5, 2005, wherein petitioner maintains that the Notice to File Corrected Application Papers was never received.

TREATMENT UNDER 37 CFR 1.181(a)

Section 711.03(c) of the Manual of Patent Examining Procedure (MPEP) explains the evidentiary showing that must be made in order for a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment based on nonreceipt of an Office action and states, in pertinent part, that:

To minimize costs and burdens to practitioners and the Office, the Office has modified the showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office action. The showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office communication must include a statement from the practitioner stating that the Office communication was not received by the practitioner and attesting to the fact that a search of the file jacket and docket records indicates that the Office communication was not received. A copy of the docket record where the nonreceived Office communication would have been entered had it been received and docketed must be attached to and referenced in practitioner's statement. For example, if a three month period for reply was set in the nonreceived Office action, a copy of the docket report showing all replies docketed for a date three months from the mail date of the nonreceived Office action must be submitted as documentary proof of nonreceipt of the Office action.

Petitioner has indicated that relevant docket records were not provided with the petition because petitioner does not maintain docket records for incoming correspondence from the Patent and Trademark Office. It is noted that the aforementioned section of the MPEP intimates that the evidentiary burden for this kind of petition has been minimized to make it less burdensome on the petitioner requiring only a search of the file jacket, a statement of knowledge, and a copy of the docket records. Petitioner is requesting that the holding of abandonment be withdrawn without the having met the minimal evidentiary burden of supplying the relevant docket records. This request cannot be granted. Petitioner has not met the minimal evidentiary burden required and the petition is dismissed, accordingly.

TREATMENT UNDER 37 CFR 1.137(a)

A grantable petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a)¹ must be accompanied by: (1) the required reply,² unless previously filed; (2) the petition fee as set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(1); (3) a showing to the satisfaction of the Commissioner that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to this paragraph was unavoidable; and (4) any terminal disclaimer required by 37 CFR 1.137(c).

The instant petition lacks item (3).

The Commissioner is responsible for determining the standard for unavoidable delay and for applying that standard.

“In the specialized field of patent law, . . . the Commissioner of Patent and Trademarks is primarily responsible for the application and enforcement of the various narrow and technical statutory and regulatory provisions. The Commissioner’s interpretation of those provisions is entitled to considerable deference.”³

“[T]he Commissioner’s discretion cannot remain wholly uncontrolled, if the facts **clearly** demonstrate that the applicant’s delay in prosecuting the application was unavoidable, and that the Commissioner’s adverse determination lacked **any** basis in reason or common sense.”⁴

¹As amended effective December 1, 1997. See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice 62 Fed. Reg. 53131, 53194-95 (October 10, 1997), 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office 63, 119-20 (October 21, 1997).

² In a nonprovisional application abandoned for failure to prosecute, the required reply may be met by the filing of a continuing application. In an application or patent, abandoned or lapsed for failure to pay the issue fee or any portion thereof, the required reply must be the payment of the issue fee or any outstanding balance thereof.

³Rydeen v. Quigg, 748 F.Supp. 900, 904, 16 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1876 (D.D.C. 1990), aff’d without opinion (Rule 36), 937 F.2d 623 (Fed. Cir. 1991) (citing Morganroth v. Quigg, 885 F.2d 843, 848, 12 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1125 (Fed. Cir. 1989); Ethicon, Inc. v. Quigg 849 F.2d 1422, 7 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1152 (Fed. Cir. 1988) (“an agency’ interpretation of a statute it administers is entitled to deference”); see also Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defence Council, Inc., 467 U.S. 837, 844, 81 L. Ed. 694, 104 S. Ct. 2778 (1984) (“if the statute is silent or ambiguous with respect to the specific issue, the question for the court is whether the agency’s answer is based on a permissible construction of the statute.”)

⁴Commissariat A L’Energie Atomique et al. v. Watson, 274 F.2d 594, 597, 124 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 126 (D.C. Cir. 1960) (emphasis added).

“The court’s review of a Commissioner’s decision is ‘limited, however, to a determination of whether the agency finding was arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with the law.’”⁵

“The scope of review under the arbitrary and capricious standard is narrow and a court is not to substitute its judgment for that of the agency.”⁶

The standard

“[T]he question of whether an applicant’s delay in prosecuting an application was unavoidable must be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking all of the facts and circumstances into account.”⁷

The general question asked by the Office is: “Did petitioner act as a reasonable and prudent person in relation to his most important business?”⁸ Nonawarness of a PTO rule will not constitute unavoidable delay.⁹

Application of the standard to the current facts and circumstances

With regard to item (3) above, the aforementioned argument of petitioner in support of petitioner’s belief that the above-cited application was unavoidably abandoned is not persuasive. The reason petitioner’s argument must necessarily fail are addressed below.

Where non-receipt of an Office action is advanced as the reason for the delay in responding to the Office action, the evidentiary burden imposed by a petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is the same as the evidentiary burden imposed by the petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment. Accordingly, the petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) is dismissed for the same reason indicated above as the petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment.

It is further noted that a successful petition under 37 CFR 1.137(a) requires that petitioner making a “showing”, or establish, that the delay was unavoidable. Without the docket records, petitioner is not able to make the required showing. Further, petitioner is required to demonstrate that petitioner acted reasonably and prudently relative to the prosecution of the application. Arguably, it is both reasonable and prudent for petitioner to maintain a docketing system for the incoming and outgoing correspondence

⁵Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316, 5 U.S.P.Q.2d (BNA) 1130 (N.D. Ind. 1987) (citing Camp v. Pitts, 411 U.S. 138, 93 S. Ct.1241, 1244 (1973) (citing 5 U.S.C. §706 (2)(A)); Beerly v. Dept. of Treasury, 768 F.2d 942, 945 (7th Cir. 1985); Smith v. Mossinghoff, 217 U.S. App. D.C. 27, 671 F.2d 533, 538 (D.C. Cir.1982)).

⁶Ray v. Lehman, 55 F.3d 606, 608, 34 U.S.P.Q2d (BNA) 1786 (Fed. Cir. 1995) (citing Motor Vehicles Mfrs. Ass’n v. State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co., 463 U.S. 29, 43, 77 L.Ed.2d 443, 103 S. Ct. 2856 (1983)).

⁷Id.

⁸See In re Mattulah, 38 App. D.C. 497 (D.C. Cir. 1912).

⁹See Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 977 (Fed. Cir. 1982) (citing Potter v. Dann, 201 U.S.P.Q. (BNA) 574 (D.D.C. 1978) for the proposition that counsel’s nonawarness of PTO rules does not constitute “unavoidable” delay). Although court decisions have only addressed the issue of lack of knowledge of an attorney, there is no reason to expect a different result due to lack of knowledge on the part of a pro se (one who prosecutes on his own) applicant. It would be inequitable for a court to determine that a client who spends his hard earned money on an attorney who happens not to know a specific rule should be held to a higher standard than a pro se applicant who makes (or is forced to make) the decision to file the application without the assistance of counsel.

relative to the prosecution of the subject application. Presumably, these docket records could be useful in many circumstances that could arise during the prosecution of the application. Petitioner's failure to maintain these records is arguably, imprudent, and belies the assertion that delay in responding to the Notice to File Corrected Application Papers was unavoidable.

Alternatively, petitioner may revive the application based on unintentional abandonment under 37 CFR 1.137(b) (enclosed). A grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) must be accompanied by the required reply, the required petition fee (\$1500.00 for a large entity and \$750.00 for a verified small entity), and a statement that the **entire** delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 CFR 1.137(b) was unintentional.

Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By mail: Commissioner for Patents
United States Patent and Trademark Office
Box 1450
Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By facsimile: (571) 273-8300
Attn: Office of Petitions

Telephone inquiries should be directed to the undersigned (571) 272-3222.

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Enclosure: Form PTO/SB/64